

Acclimation of transfer students to a University of Illinois college

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**Introduction to the issue**

The University of Illinois Undergraduate Admissions Office hosts an annual meeting and invites the transfer coordinators from every community college in the state of Illinois to the Urbana-Champaign campus to discuss issues related to transfer students and changes in admission requirements. There is a long standing joke at this meeting about how difficult it is to transfer to the University of Illinois from a community college and even if a student is admitted, students do not do well their first semester due to the cold reception to off-campus transfer students.

In March 2007, the University took on the formation of a grand strategic plan that would create a more focused approach for all facets of the university; education, research and economic development (University of Illinois Strategic Plan, 2007). The University of Illinois recognized at this point during their self-review, that highly qualified students who elected to begin their higher education career at a community college (or other 4-year institution) were making the conscious choice to not attend the University of Illinois due to not articulating credit directly to University of Illinois courses.

This, of course, created a significant barrier to transfer prior to the installation of the statewide Illinois Articulation Initiative (IAI). This initiative created master syllabi for many standard general education courses and gave each of these courses codes that made the bearers transferable as general education courses to every participating institution in the state. This collaborative project opened the door to the University of Illinois at a time where the university was seeing opportunities for increased enrollment in their upper –division courses. Thusly, the University of Illinois outlined a new Enrollment Management Plan “that modestly decreases the

size of the freshman class and strategically expands the transfer student population” (University of Illinois Strategic Management Plan, 2007, p. 9).

The university has technically not “opened the floodgates” to off-campus transfer students, but they have created programs to recruit and retain students. The Parkland Pathway to Illinois program was the first university-wide program that offered guaranteed admission to students completing a two-year dual enrollment program between Parkland College in Champaign, Illinois and the University of Illinois. Students are required to transfer to a participating major, but also have the opportunity to live in university housing, use the extensive library system and other campus resources. Initially funded by the Lumina Foundation for Education, this program dramatically grew in size from a small cohort of approximately 30 students to enrolling well over 200 students in its fifth year.

Additionally, that same Lumina grant funded the creation of a group of transfer mentors called Transfer Experience and Advising Mentors (TEAM) (Office of Community College Research and Leadership, 2012). The aim of this group was to assist in acclimating students to the campus and assist with any questions or concerns from the students with a three-prong approach: TEAM Leaders, AdviserLink, and Institutional Financial Aid policies. TEAM leaders were selected from previous transfer students and ones that had become active at the University of Illinois through cultural houses or registered student organizations (Office of Community College Research and Leadership, 2012). These leaders would communicate frequently with prospective transfer students, visit community colleges around the state as well as maintain a transfer blog as a communication tool.

In structuring the TEAM project, a Web portal, “AdviserLink” was created to help community college advisors in advising prospective students (Office of Community College

Research and Leadership, 2012). In reviewing unsuccessful transfer applications, it was found that many students had not completed required courses for entry and while this could be due to ambiguity of the required courses, it could also be attributed to incomplete advising at the community college. A web portal like AdviserLink is helpful for clarity and concise information.

Finally, the TEAM Project worked closely with Financial Aid administrators to make the Illinois Promise program more widely available to transfer students. The Illinois Promise program covers tuition, fees and board, so having this scholarship available to transfer students would be very helpful. Unfortunately, at the time of this writing, the grant has expired and the TEAM Project has been defunded.

### **Why it is important issue to examine at UIUC**

Campus-level admissions policies and programs are extremely important in admitting students to the university, but after the student arrives on campus, they are not only part of the campus at large, but also part of a much smaller cohort of students into a particular college, division or school. The resources for and first semester experiences of these new students vary from college to college as some transfer students are required to enroll and complete a transfer orientation course while others do not require any additional coursework. This is much different than new incoming first time freshmen who are required to take a version of the University 101 course to orient these students to the structure of the university including its resources, supports and policies.

Further, the size of the University of Illinois can be alarming to the majority of transfer students that matriculate from much smaller two-year institutions. Community colleges range in size from the largest community college in the state, College of DuPage (COD) in Glen Ellyn, IL, reporting 15,397 total enrollees to the smallest community college in the state of Illinois, by

full-time enrollment (FTE), Shawnee Community College in Ullin, Illinois with a registration of only 1,040 (Illinois Community College Board, 2012). The University of Illinois, for the Fall 2012 term, reporting 42,883 enrolled students (Division of Information Management, 2012). This is almost triple the enrollment of COD and 40 times the enrollment of Shawnee Community College.

Shawnee Community College is located in Pulaski County in the southernmost part of Illinois where the population of 6,161 is primarily agriculturally focused and rural with per capita annual incomes averaging \$13,325. These students, from this small county and even smaller community college, transfer to the University of Illinois where it would be understandable for them to feel lost in a sea of 40,000 students.

Additionally, and as some would view to be more important, the transfer function of the community college provides students with opportunities for upward mobility. Upward mobility is a term used when person changes their social status to a higher position. Community colleges have open access admission policies and accept students from all walks of life. For many students who complete their academic programs with a certificate or associate's degree, they are regulated to occupations and careers that are usually lower wage than those that have a bachelor's or advanced degree (Bragg, D. 2001; Romano, R.M., 2011). Opening the door to 4-year institutions from the community college will greatly increase the opportunity for students to change their social status due to education and higher wages.

Furthermore, the University of Illinois is the land-grant institution of the State of Illinois. The Morrill Acts of 1862 and 1890 granted the State of Illinois with 480,000 acres to sell or use as it wishes to fund the Illinois Industrial University (University Mission, 2013). The primary focus of the land-grant mission was to extend education past the Liberal Arts education to

programs in the sciences that were viewed to be more useful and practical to Illinoisans at the turn of the century. This mission of the land-grant colleges of extending education to all is further supported by increasing community college transfers to the University of Illinois.

### **Specific Questions to be addressed**

In becoming increasingly transfer friendly to prospective students, the University of Illinois leaves the issue of orientation of off-campus transfer students to the college, division or school in which they were admitted. This research will focus on off-campus students who transferred directly into the College of Agricultural, Consumer and Environmental Sciences (ACES) at the University of Illinois' flagship campus.

The College of ACES has two very significant structures in place to support community college transfer students: Coordinator for Transfer Recruitment and ACES 200 – Transfer Orientation. The Coordinator for Transfer Recruitment pre-advises prospective transfer students, assists with the application process, visits community colleges as well as provides supports after admission and matriculation. ACES 200 is a required course for transfer students (though it has no credit assigned to it) that meets once a week in the fall semester. This seminar course brings speakers from areas within the College of ACES; Education Abroad, Course Articulation, ACES Career Center, and the Graduation unit.

This research addresses the following questions:

- *Do transfer students feel connected to the campus and to the College of ACES one semester after transfer?*
- *If the student took the ACES 200 course, did it help them in making the connection to the college and to the university? Why or Why Not?*
- *Do community college transfers have the same feelings toward pre-advising, orientation courses and registered student organizations as 4-year institution transfer students?*

### **Literature Review**

The issue of adjustment for students entering four-year universities has been heavily researched from many different angles ranging from the students perspectives to viewing the transition from the faculty member (Bragg, 2001; Dowd, A.C., Cheslock, J.J. & Melguizo, T., 2008; Hagerdorn, L.S., Cypers, S. & Lester, J. 2010; Laanan, F.S., 2007; Pascarella, E.T. & Terenzini, P.T., 2005). As more students are entering baccalaureate programs from community colleges, the body of research has expanded to include this population as one that has particular adjustment and acclimation issues upon transfer. The University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign has recently become more open to transfer students so it is extremely important to review the previous literature on what works for the student adjustment process. This literature review focuses on research done since 2000, but could not ignore important works done in earlier years that drove the more current research. Furthermore, the scope of this literature review focused on social mobility and equity on why opening the door to transfers and ensuring that they adjust to the campus culture was important, but went further to examine what other research has to say on the adjustment to campus.

This study will add to the growing literature concerning adjustment to a highly selective, Research I, Land Grant institution. With the renewed focus on increasing transfer students to 4-year universities, it is imperative to pinpoint exactly where the students view the process as working and where the acclimation and adjustment is failing.

### **The Transfer Issue**

Junior colleges were initially created to act as a funnel for higher education institutions. These two-year programs were constructed to provide the necessary general education courses needed to succeed in upper-level research (Bragg, 2001). However, as the needs of the

communities became more diverse, the community college integrated the transfer function with more terminal certificate and degree functions (Bragg, 2001). As community colleges worked to fulfill this niche, their status as feeders became equitable to “lesser than”. Students who elected to attend a community college tended to be from low-socioeconomic backgrounds, have parents without high levels of education and be People of Color (Bragg, 2001; Dowd, Cheslock & Melguizo, 2008). Furthermore, when students leave the community college earning a certificate or associate’s degree, they tend to be employed at lower wage positions than those that have earned a baccalaureate degree (Romano, 2011). “A consensus of studies indicates that a year of postsecondary education, at any level, increases yearly earnings, adjusted for inflation, by about 5% to 12%. This would make 4-years of college about twice as valuable as 2-years” (Romano, R, 2011, p. 75).

For high school students beginning at the lowest rungs of the educational ladders (community colleges) and then attempting to continue their education at selective institutions of higher education (similar to the University of Illinois), it is very important for these particular students to have access. Dowd, Cheslock & Melguizo (2008) state quite bluntly “The exclusion of poor, working-class, and racial-ethnic minority students from elite institutions reduces the probability that these students will enter positions of power in society” (p. 444). Opening the doors and ensuring that students are receiving the supports needed to adjust to their new surroundings is most important in the transfer process.

### **Adjustment After Transfer**

**Initial Transfer.** John Hills (1965) coined the term transfer shock in relation to students entering the university after completing at least one semester at the community college and experiencing a dip in their grade point average. Though the term “transfer shock” is most



commonly used to describe a decrease in grade point average the first and second semester after the transfer process has concluded, it has also been used to describe the distress a student may feel when attempting to make a connection or acclimate to their new institution's culture (Hills, 1965; Cejda, 1997). The reasoning for the dip in grade point average varies significantly from the unexpected rigor of the coursework to the inability to adjust to the campus culture (Cejda, 1997).

**Supportive Programs.** Barbara K. Townsend and Kristin Wilson's 2006 study of students that transferred from a community college to a larger four-year university found that transfer students had issues surrounding support before and during the transfer process, orientation of transfer students as well as experiences related to faculty interaction (Townsend & Wilson, 2006). This qualitative study highlighted that the students felt the community colleges only went so far into the transfer process and did not assist in securing applications, ensuring that credits transferred and assisting in scholarship searches. Most students surveyed stated that the community college referred the student to the university for more information and did not assist the student in locating the information (Townsend & Wilson, 2006). Of the students that did ask the university for assistance, they did not feel that it was helpful citing that the university representatives pointed them to websites or provided handouts (Townsend & Wilson, 2006).

In regards to the orientation of transfer students, many felt that the programs for transfer students were too formal and lacked the voice of students that had transferred before them and could impart their experiences (Townsend & Wilson, 2006). Finally, many transfer students had difficulty connecting with faculty members due to their focus on research (Townsend & Wilson, 2006). In regards to orientation programs, Pascarella & Terenzini (2005) noted in their seminal

work that students who participate in first year seminars are more likely to persist in their degree program than those students who do not.

**Transfer and Identity.** Tinto's (1993) theory of student retention seems to drive many efforts of student retention at the University level. Through his research he theorized that student's determination to succeed at their university was shaped by their own personal characteristics and abilities, but were also shaped by their experiences while at the university (Tinto, 1993). Conversely, Laanan in her 2007 study of transfer student adjustment concluded that "although these characteristics [age, honors status and racial/ethnic category] likely play a role in who attends college and who transfers to a 4-year institution, they lose their significance and wash out in the prediction of student's adjustment" (Laanan, 2007, p. 55). Her study centered on 717 students who transferred to the fictitious Sunshine University from the California Community College system and while many of her findings were not surprising in that those students with low grade point averages at transfer as well as those with low self-concepts would not adjust to the university successfully, others were: students that meet with their advisor often as well as attend university-sponsored academic workshops were also unsuccessful in their acclimation to Sunshine University.

Finally, community college students cannot be combined and viewed as one group where transfer issues that affect one can be assumed to affect all. Matthew Wawrzynski and William Sedlacek, in their 2003 study, surveyed 2,492 incoming transfer students to a mid-Atlantic public university to gauge how race and gender affected a student's transition to campus. Wawrzynski and Sedlacek noted that the previous studies were too basic and single-layered in their reviews of the transition of transfer students stating that "when researchers and practitioners view transfer

students with a singular perspective, the consequent stereotyping and myths influence the way we understand and serve this growing student population” (p. 489).

In separating Students of Color from the larger group of respondents it was apparent that this sub-set of students were expecting to interact with their faculty members as well as other students outside of the classroom, and when they did not, their connection to the campus was lost (Wawrzynski & Sedlacek, 2003). Further, both students of color and females were interested in meeting and socializing with different cultures and backgrounds as a way to feel more connected to their institutions. This study also made sure to note that it is very important for students of color and women to “develop a sense of community” for these populations (Wawrzynski & Sedlacek, 2003, p. 498).

All research examined for this literature review was intended to support the stance that students who are transferring from the community college are important to the growth of the university. This growth is not limited to the physical number of transfer students but also to the diversity and equity of opportunity. Because transfer students are entering the four-year institution after spending several semesters at another institution, research has shown that these students have a difficult time adjusting to new rules and cultures of their school (Cejda, 1997; Hagerdorn et al., 2010; Hills, J. R., 1965; Laanan, F. S., 2007; Townsend, B. K. & Wilson, K., 2006). In Tinto’s 1993 look at student attrition, he hypothesized that students will look back on the pre-collegiate expectations and measures their actual experiences against these. In reviewing who attends the community college and how students view their transition, this will undoubtedly inform those higher education administrators focused on transition and retention to develop programs more fully rooted in the transfer student experience.

### **Methodology**

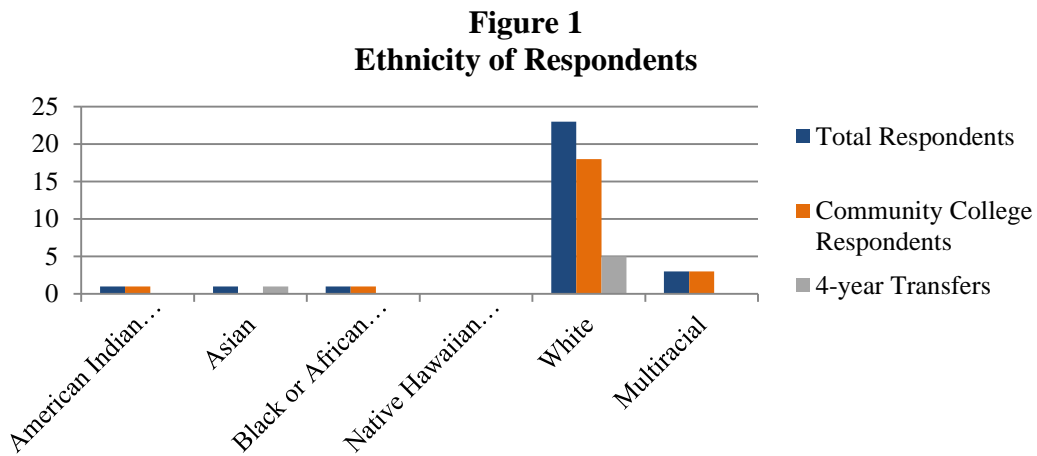
On April 22<sup>nd</sup> and April 25<sup>th</sup>, 2013, the author emailed 175 transfer students from the Fall 2012 and Spring 103 transfer terms to the College of Agricultural, Consumer and Environmental Sciences. Of the 175 students that were emailed, the author received two undeliverable error emails which reduced the sample to 173 students. Of the 173 students contacted on both dates, the author received 29 completed surveys, providing a response rate of 16.7%.

**Instrument.** The author designed a survey instrument based on previous literature related to acclimation of transfer students to 4-year institutions. The questions included the student's major, minor and at what point in their educational career did s/he select their major. Additionally, a 5-point Likert scale (very helpful, helpful, average, unhelpful, very unhelpful) was included in this instrument. Three dependent variables were utilized based on the literature related to pre-advising at the University-level, orientation courses and registered student organizations. The pre-advising scale was developed from the satisfaction with their experience working with the Coordinator of Transfer Recruitment and/or departmental advisors from within the student's major. The orientation course scale was developed from the satisfaction with the student's experience in the ACES 200 orientation course in acclimating him or her to campus. The registered student organization scale was derived from satisfaction regarding the experience of being a part of a registered student organization in acclimating to campus. Opportunities for open-ended suggestions regarding specific experiences as well as what could improve the transfer process were offered after every scale.

**Results.** Of the 29 students that responded to the survey request, 3 identified as Hispanic and 26 as not Hispanic. The majority of respondents identify as white (23), while 1 respondent

identified as Black or African American, 1 as Asian and 1 as American Indian or Alaska Native. 3 students identified as multiracial.

23 students identified as community college transfer students with 2 identifying as Hispanic and 21 identifying as not Hispanic. 18 self-identified as White, 3 as multi-racial, 1 as American Indian or Alaska Native, and 1 as Black or African American. Ethnicities of the respondents are charted in Figure 1.



An examination of the survey results showed that for students transferring to the College of Agricultural, Consumer and Environmental Sciences, pre-advising by the Coordinator for Transfer Recruitment was overall very helpful in their adjustment to campus with an average rating of 4.63. Further, departmental academic advising was also found to be helpful during the transfer process with an average rating of 3.50 (Figure 2.1).

**Figure 2.1  
College-level advising - Overall**

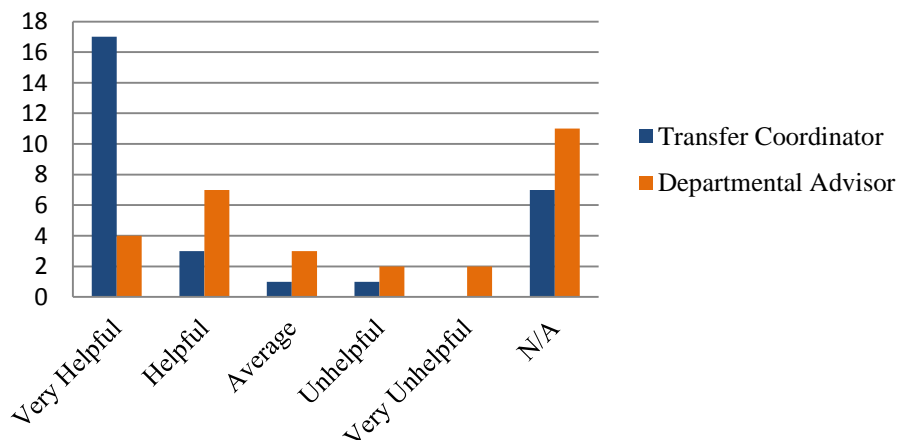


Figure 2.2 narrows the respondents to community college transfer students and relate their perspective on college and departmental advising. Community college students rate the Coordinator for Transfer Recruitment at 4.76 and Departmental Advising at 3.53.

**Figure 2.2**  
**College-level advising – Community College Students**

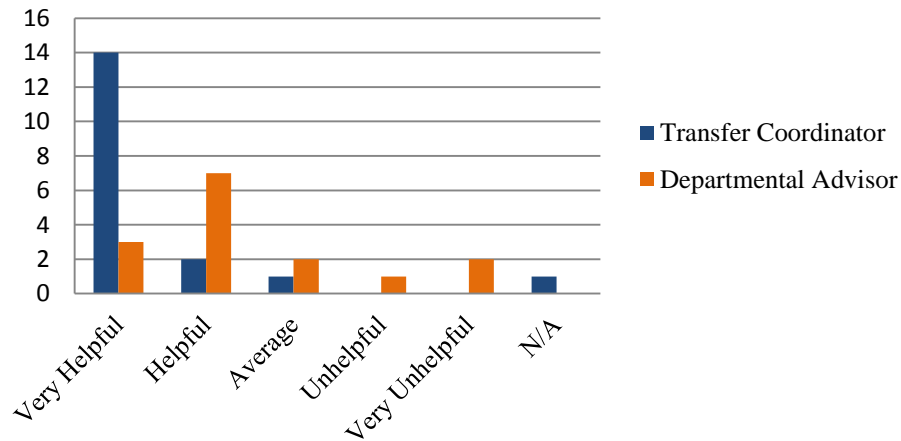
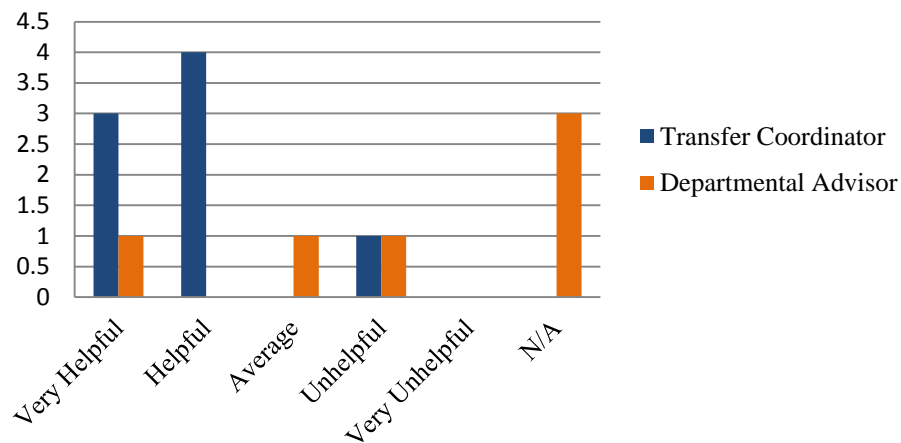


Figure 2.3 isolates the responses for transfers that have not attended a community college in their higher education careers. 4-Year transfer student’s report that the Coordinator for Transfer Recruitment as helpful with a score of 4.2, though departmental advising ranked significantly lower at 3.33 average.

**Figure 2.3**  
**College-level advising – 4-year Transfer Students**



A sample of the answers transfer students provided to the open-ended question “What made the (Coordinator for Transfer Recruitment) more or less helpful” with:

*“She is very knowledgable [sic] at what she does and, as the first person I met while visiting, made me feel very welcome. She answered any and all questions I had and made sure I was on the right track.”*

*“She was very easy to talk to. She knew the answer to almost every question I asked, and if she didn't she would find out and contact me with the answer.”*

*“I received direction with the emails that were sent to me. I understood what I had to do”*

*“Did not facilitate the transferring of credits. I felt she did the minimum to just have everything not transfer even though I had the same major at my previous institution which is more renowned for wildlife conservation/biology than UIUC.”*

*“She contacted me upon receiving my initial application that was rejected. I had no contacts at UIUC and she reached out to me. The ACES website was scary and confusing so it was nice to have some personal contact.”*

A sample of the answers transfer students provided to the open-ended question “Any further comments regarding departmental advising” with:

*“Outstanding job!”*

*“I would much rather talk with [Coordinator for Transfer Recruitment]. [Departmental Advisor] makes me feel awful about myself and crushes the little confidence I have. We just don't seem to get along which is a problem I've never had before.”*

*“After my first semester here I was assigned an advisor that I was required to meet with before I registered for spring semester. He was completely useless when it came to advising. He didn't know any of the requirements for my degree nor was he supportive of the fact I didn't want to be a vet. I felt like I was an inconvenience to him.”*

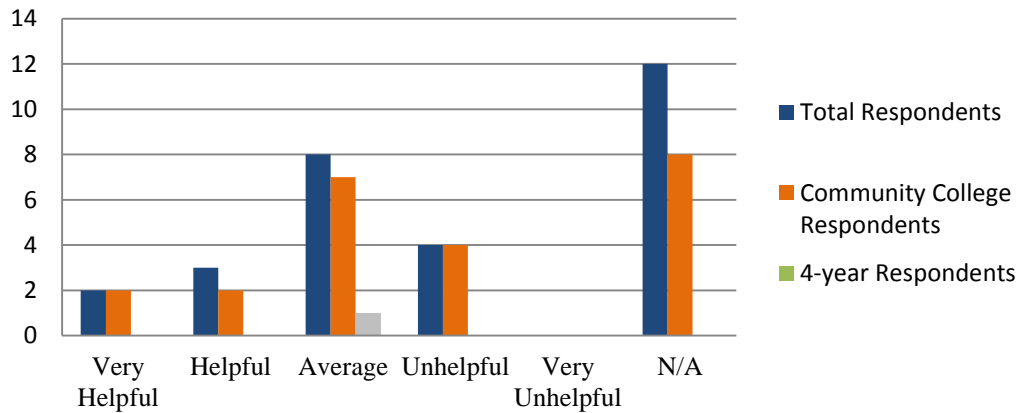
*“I felt like I was better prepared by my advisor at [previous institution] to select my fall classes at U of I than my U of I advisor prepared me”*

*“[Departmental Advisor] does her job very well. She is also extremely helpful.”*

Figure 3 provides students' level of satisfaction with the orientation course required of all fall transfer students. Of the 17 students that responded to the question on how well ACES 200

assisted them in acclimating to the University of Illinois, most found the course Average and neither helpful nor unhelpful with an average score of 3.17. Additionally, community college students ranked ACES 200 similarly at an average score of 3.13. Only one respondent was a 4-year university transfer and rates ACES 200 as a 3.0.

**Figure 3  
ACES 200**



Two open-ended questions were provided for ACES 200. The first was “What was your overall perception of ACES 200” and the second was “What suggestions do you have for improvement. Selected answers are provided below:

Perceptions:

*“While I was dreading having to take yet another orientation class such as ACES 200 I found it very helpful.”*

*“It was good to learn about the different programs offered on campus. The thing I liked the most was it put me in contact with other transfer students so I didn't feel so isolated. It was nice to meet people in the same place as I was in.”*

*“It was a good orientation that helped me learn the basics here at U of I.”*

*“I liked the course. I learned a lot about things that non-transfer students don't even know about! A lot of resources at UIUC go unused simply because nobody knows about them. This class taught you what you could use and how you can get ahead.”*



Suggestions:

*“Smaller class size”*

*“I would like to learn how to use the database to see if courses [sic] from other community colleges transfer.*

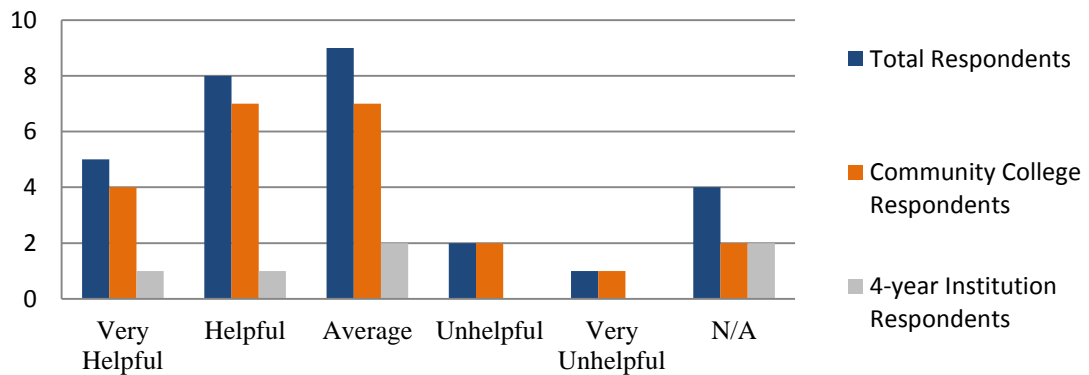
*“Try to avoid information that has already been given by advisers or other classes.”*

*“Make it more exciting.”*

*“More focus needs to be put on transfer credits and class scheduling”*

Figure 4 shows how much students felt that Registered Student Organizations (RSOs) assisted them in acclimating to the University of Illinois. Based on the Likert scale, students rated RSOs as a 3.56 which means it is almost centered between Average and Helpful for transfer students in transitioning to the University. Community College Respondents rated RSOs similarly in their adjustment to campus with an overall average score of 3.52. Additionally, 4-year transfers answered similarly with an overall average score of 3.75.

**Figure 4**  
**Registered Student Organizations**



Surprisingly, students did not provide any feedback regarding their Registered Student Organization in relation to their effects on the student’s acclimation and adjustment to college.

Surveyed students were also asked what information they wish they would have received through ACES 200 or transfer orientation to assist with their adjustment to campus. Selected responses are as follows:

*“I think they should have covered the DARS audit better so I understood what it meant when I was choosing my classes for the first semester. I also wish we would have gotten more individual help. I think if I would have had a bit more explanation on the courses and what everything meant I would have been a lot less anxious.”*

*“It would have been nice if they talked about all the student ACES clubs”*

*“I wish I would have received more information on class difficulty compared to those at a community college. I chose classes which were altogether far too difficult for me during my first semester. As a result, I was extremely stressed and my GPA plummeted.”*

*“I wish illinois.edu would have been explained more fully to me. I was unsure how to search classes that I needed before a friend explained it to me.”*

*“Coming from a community college I felt fairly well adjusted. I think the big thing would be to encourage students to get involved and get out and meet new people!”*

*“A concrete list of classes that transferred before my first semester began. Help in getting courses to transfer toward my degree.”*

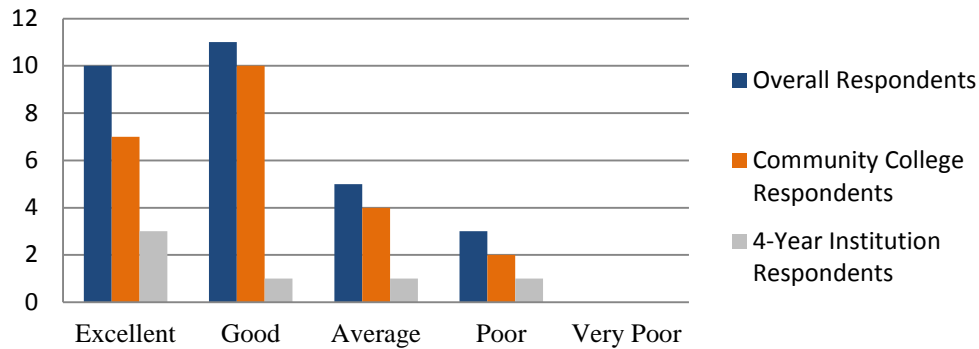
*“To know the disadvantage of being a transfer. Such as in order to complete the program 'on time' (in 2 years) that it is hard to make room for electives in order to fulfill the degree requirements. Get to know an advisor quickly. If you want to study abroad, you may need a letter of recommendation [sic] and I found it hard to find a professor to write a letter for me because the time was short in order to get to know someone for me.”*

*“To utilize more campus resources such as McKinley and the Business Center. Those places do not exist for free and with such convenience in the real world!”*

Figure 5 represents responses from transfer students to the University of Illinois, College of ACES in regards to their overall transfer experience. Overall, 11 students felt that their experience was good, though 10 students categorized the experience as Excellent. The average score was 3.96. Similarly, community college students rate their transfer experience highly as well with an average score of 3.95. 10 students rate the experience as Good and 7 rate it as

excellent. Finally, 4-year institution transfer respondents ranked their overall transfer experience highly with an overall score of 4.0 with 3 students ranking their experience as Excellent.

**Figure 5**  
**Overall Transfer Experience**



Students were also given the opportunity to provide suggestions on improving the adjustment of transfer students to the College of ACES. Selected responses include:

*“There was a lot of things I had to figure out for myself when I got here. How to sign up for classes and which ones would benefit me the most. I'm still not sure i completely understand everything on the DARS audits. I highly recommend training the advisors more in how to assist students.”*

*“Stress the importance of making friends through student organizations.”*  
*“Having a bigger support group contacting the transfer students periodically. Maybe having a mentor in the college or with the same major showing them the ropes and being guidance besides the advisors.”*

*“More study help. It's hard adjusting to the rigorous classes. Coming from a community college where class is a joke and then coming to UIUC is at first shocking. I adjusted to the high expectations after a semester but it would have been helpful knowing what I was getting myself into.”*

*“Just to be ready for a large course load and that graduating in two years as a James Scholar may be almost impossible due to the shortage of upper level classes and their varying offering times. A degree plan should be created with an adviser as soon as possible and followed as closely as possible.”*

### **Discussion**

Students who transferred to the University of Illinois were generally satisfied with their transfer experience including pre-advising at the University, required orientation course and registered student organizations in acclimating them to campus. The knowledge students receive in relation to their coursework prior to transferring seems to be a salient factor in their adjustment to campus, second only to the helpfulness of their departmental advisor. Departmental advising was lower in rating than the college-level Coordinator for Transfer Recruitment which could be due to the advising structure in the College of ACES which compromise both professional and faculty advising. Half of the majors have professional advisors that do little to no teaching. The remaining majors have faculty advisors that advise students in addition to their teaching and research activities. Based on survey responses, many students felt that their advisor did not give them enough attention or time due to other restrictions placed on the faculty advisors time.

The transfer orientation course, ACES 200, was described in comments as boring and too easy. Orientation courses have the opportunity to really provide students with practical and useful information, but this information needs to be relayed in a way that the students can benefit from it. Leaders and Administrators in the College of Agricultural, Consumer and Environmental Sciences now have qualitative and quantitative data that can be used to effect real and sustainable change to the course. Both community college students and 4-year transfer students were similar in their responses to these questions.

### **Self-Reflexivity**

In my position as the Coordinator for Transfer Recruitment for the College of ACES, I work very closely with all community colleges in the State of Illinois to bring their best and

brightest to the University of Illinois and specifically, to the majors within my college. In this position I pre-advise students on the best courses to take at their previous institution prior to making the transfer to the university and then, once the student is admitted, I work closely with the University of Illinois Course Articulation Department to advocate on the students behalf for courses to transfer correctly. Further, I assist students in navigating the university and its many resources.

Transfer students are required to take a transfer specific 8-week orientation course titled ACES 200 – ACES Transfer Orientation where students are engaged in the many different aspects of the college from the research opportunities available to education abroad and career services. I present to students in this class regarding their previously completed coursework as well as my role as a person to answer general college questions or to provide additional information in regards to Urbana- Champaign.

However, since students are encouraged to meet with their professional or faculty advisors upon transfer, I often am not able to gauge how well students are adjusting to campus. This opportunity to survey transfer students as to what helped them most in making the transition from the community college to the University of Illinois seemed to be an excellent opportunity to shine light on the transfer student experience.

**What I did.** With my overall research interest centering on the transfer experience of students of color from large, urban community colleges to the University of Illinois in majors that have historical racism (e.g. Crop Sciences, Horticulture) tied to them, I took this opportunity to survey most transfer students from the Fall 2012 and Spring 2013 transfer period.

I did not survey all students that transferred from off campus due to my position as advisor for the Parkland Pathway to Illinois program. This dual enrollment program requires

participating students at Parkland College in Champaign, Illinois to meet with their advisor frequently and as the advisor to 23 transfer students in the fall and spring semesters, I felt that I am too close to that particular population of students to receive unbiased feedback and removed 23 students from my survey sample.

In my survey I focused on three branches of the transfer acclimation experience, the pre-advising offered by the College of ACES, ACES 200 and Registered Student Organizations (RSO). I focused on these three because the initial pre-advising provided a link to campus, whether it was me in my position or another faculty member or advisor. ACES 200 seems to give a brief overview of campus and resources available, and Registered Student Organizations provide the socialization that many transfer students need when integrating with those students who began at the University their freshmen year.

In structuring this survey instrument, I was very concerned that students would connect my name and my position to the fact I am asking questions about how I assisted in their transfer to the university. I had to be very clear that the survey was completely anonymous and could not be tied to any certain individuals to ensure that the data provided would be not provided under duress in any form.

**What I Could Have Done.** In hindsight, as an employee and a student of the University of Illinois, I failed to contact the dean of my college for input regarding the questions I was asking of our current students. In discussing the focal points of the research for this particular question, the associate dean provided the important insight that we are asking these students very important questions in regards to the inner workings of our college as well as what their particular experience has been. It is extremely important to view their time wisely and to ask the best questions possible since this survey may be the only time to get their complete and honest

feedback. What I have found in this situation is that I need to be more aware of the intersectionality of my roles at the University and not to section each from the other since there is constant intertwining and impact.

In regards to the construction of the project itself, I would have preferred to survey all transfer students, but also add an interview part to the project in order to access particular stories and situations that illustrated the struggle of the transition or how one of the three branches of the acclimation process succeeded in helping a student adjust to the larger institution. The survey instrument allows for short answers to open ended questions of how pre-advising helped or hindered or how ACES 200 could be structured to provide additional information, but the interviewing of students provides more concrete examples of situations that occurred or ways to improve the transfer student experience.

**The Future.** Working on this project continues to solidify my dedication to working with community college transfer students at the 4-year university level. It is my goal, in my position and with my future research, to create a more streamlined approach to the transfer process. This may mean removing barriers to transfer and increasing transparency of the process, but also means diving down and illuminating the historical, programmatic racism tied to Students of Color in traditional agriculture majors. We, as a college and as a university, must not just take into consideration the experiences of this distinct group of students, but let it inform and guide our practices.

### **Conclusion**

Overall the results of this study show that pre-transfer advising at the college-level is helpful in their acclimation to campus while Registered Student Organizations and ACES 200 place second and third respectively. In particular it seems that it is crucial for students to receive

timely information in a large format like ACES 200 so they are more aware of clubs and resources available to them.

The findings of this study are incredibly important as the University of Illinois increases its activities to recruit well-qualified transfer students to the Urbana-Champaign campus. The responsibility for transfer students having a meaningful transfer experience rests with the previous and current institutions. In order for transfer students to feel a connection to their campus and adjust to the climate of their institution, it is crucial for these students to receive timely and accurate information.



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